

THE MIDNIGHT CRY.

THE coming of "the Son of man" is likened by our Lord to the sudden approach of the bridegroom to the ten virgins, when "at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh." It will be at a time when men look not for him, and in an hour that they are not aware of.

The cry will not only reach the living, but will awaken the dead also: "All that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

It will be the period when the real character of every one will be disclosed. How many now are taken to be what they really are not! They have a form of godliness, but are destitute of its power; but then shall be discerned the difference "between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not."

It will be the hour of final separation: "One shall be taken, and the other left." Christ shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. In that day every one will find his own place, and every one will go to the place for which his *character fits him*. The hypocrite, the man of pride, of avarice, of pollution, and of falsehood, are not fit for heaven. One design of the judgment of the great day will be to give to every one his own proper place for eternity. God "hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained." And every one shall receive according to what he hath done in the body, whether it has been good or evil.

But while the cry, "He cometh," will be made at the ad-

vent of the Lord, the summons of death to an unconverted man, is similar in many respects, in its immediate results, to those which that cry will produce upon the wicked who shall be alive upon the earth when the Lord shall come. Surprise, confusion, anxiety, useless effort and final exclusion from the presence of the Lord, will be the effects in both cases. "As it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day, when the Son of man is revealed."

The time when the cry is made in the parable is significant. It is at midnight, the hour of forgetfulness and sleep. The seriousness of an event is often increased by the time of its occurrence. Every one feels that there are seasons which add much to the solemnity of circumstances. The cry of fire is alarming at all times; but at midnight it thrills the soul. The ocean tempest is always solemn and terrible, when the mighty billows are lifted up, and the mariners "mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths; their soul is melted because of trouble;" but the cry of the perishing on a sinking wreck at midnight, uttered amidst the flashes of the heavens, and the bellowing of the storm, is still more terrific; the wild scream of anguish seems then uttered with the bitterness of despair. The chamber of the dying is solemn; the realities of the eternal world are brought near: God is there: "How awful is this place!" but to be alone with the dying and the dead at the midnight hour, throws a deeper awe over the mind, and makes us realize more vividly and intensely the fact of our own mortality. Terrible must have been that hour in the land of Egypt when the "Lord smote all the firstborn in the land, from the first-born of Pharaoh that sat on the throne unto the first born of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the first-born of cattle. And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead." In such an hour the Son of man will come; and the alarm and terror that shall fill the hearts of the wicked, "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," shall infinitely exceed what the Egyptians felt. It is "the judgment of the great day." "The revelation of the righteous judgment of God;" and of "the wrath of the Lamb." "Every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him, and all kindreds of the earth

shall wail because of him." "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God." Upon the account that shall then be rendered, is suspended everlasting happiness or misery. How affecting will be the situation of an unpardoned sinner in that hour of judgment! He stands in the presence of God the Judge of all, without a friend to help, without an advocate to plead his cause, while his own state is to be fixed for ever! His course of folly and guilt is ended; the last prayer has been offered on his behalf, the means of escape presented; and the *last earthly sin committed!*

THE LAST SIN!—Oh! the last sin of a wicked life seems to have in it a peculiar awfulness. It completes the number and fills up the measure of iniquity: then hope is lost, and the dread result of despair and misery is reached. O sinner! the next sin which you commit may be that last to you—that which shall complete the amount of your iniquity on earth, with which you will go into the presence of God? You have been spending your life in adding sin to sin, and filling up the cup of your iniquity; that cup may now be full, and the next drop may cause it to run over. It will then be too late, for ever too late, to seek forgiveness and eternal life; 'for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.' Stay your hand, then, and turn your steps from iniquity. Seek pardon at once through the Lord Jesus Christ, while there is time. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Neglect it not, lest the day of the Lord should overtake you as a thief, and the midnight cry be heard by you; when you are entirely unprepared for it. In your present state, if you love not God, and are living in sin, were that cry to be raised to night, where God is you never could go; it would be the knell of your hope, and the signal for your eternal exclusion from the kingdom of heaven.

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 "Those holy gates for ever bar
 Pollution, sin, and shame;
 None shall obtain admittance there
 But followers of the Lamb."
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The strong desire of your heart, as an unrenewed sinner, has been, to get away from God. The thought of God has been repulsive to you; and this dislike to your Maker has shown itself in your neglect of prayer, and in the absence of all desire to please him. Where there should have been love and obedience, there have been, and it may be still are, enmity and rebellion. Yet you hope to go to heaven notwithstanding; but heaven is full of God; and if you have such a dislike

to God in this world, that you had no pleasure in thinking of him, or of reading his word, or in praying to him, how can you expect to be happy in heaven, where the glorious holiness of the Lord fills the place? A change of *worlds* will not produce a change of *nature*; but a change of *nature* and of heart is necessary, or you cannot be saved; you must have a nature that shall be like that of the holy God, and tastes and habits that shall agree with the employments and the society of heaven.

These are to be acquired by faith in Christ. This grace of faith is the gift of the Holy Spirit. It elevates and purifies the soul. By it we are justified, and made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light; and without faith it is impossible to please God. Where it exists, there will be sincere repentance on account of sin, and an earnest desire to please God; a firm *trust* and hearty confidence in all that God has revealed, and promised; and a steady looking to Jesus Christ alone for acceptance with God.

To neglect these things now, with the vague promise of attending to them at some convenient season, shows a state of awful insensibility to the claims of God, and the value of the soul. But, alas! how many during the season of health care for none of these things! Yet will the truth sometimes flash upon the mind, and the feeling arise in the heart, that this indifference will not do always; that a time will come when it must give way. When the soul hears of righteousness, temperance, judgment to come, it trembles; though it may say to conscience, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee."

Reader, has it never been thus with you? Have you never lightly dismissed, or evaded a solemn and alarming reflection? Remember, it goes away but to return again with greater power. In being shut out of your minds, it may be supposed to say, "WE SHALL MEET AGAIN!" The next meeting may be in your dying chamber, or at the judgment seat of Christ. And, Oh! what a meeting that will be, when those serious thoughts and feelings which were dismissed on earth shall confront you; and your conscience, which had been trifled with—its voice drowned, and its warnings neglected—shall be thoroughly awakened in you? If you neglect them now, it would be better for you in that day if you had never been born!

The midnight cry may be heard when many are not only least prepared, *but also least disposed* to attend to it. "Trouble me not," is the language of their hearts, who not only live, but die in a state of indifference to the value of their

souls. Thus it was before the flood, and before the cities of the plain were destroyed, and thus it is with many at death, and will be with the wicked when the Lord shall come to judge the world in righteousness. A reckless and a guilty indifference pervades the mind of many, which disposes them to say, "Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."

In others, the love of the world, or the deceitfulness of riches, or the lust of other things, has destroyed all spiritual sensibility; the heart, hard and dead by nature, becomes by sinful indulgence, twice dead to all that is holy and heavenly; and the sinner dies, as the fool dieth, without any concern about the realities beyond the grave, or in hopeless despair.

Such was the death of the unhappy man mentioned in the following account given by a minister of the gospel.

"I went," he writes, "some years ago to visit one who was so far gone, that his physician pronounced him to be, in his opinion, beyond recovery. On offering him my hand, he shook his venerable head, covered with the silvery hairs of age, and said, with a tremulous voice, 'It is too late now, sir!' I endeavored to shake his confidence in the impossibility of his salvation, by arguments drawn from the designs of our Lord's mission and death, and from his power and willingness to save the chief of sinners. He listened with profound attention to all I said, but to every argument he replied, 'It is too late now, sir! I have loved my money, and neglected my soul; yes, sir, it is too late!' I varied my method of appeal, and multiplied my arguments of encouragement, but the monotonous reply came with still stronger force of utterance. 'It is too late now, sir! I proposed praying with him; he objected, saying, 'It is too late now, sir!' After a kind and lengthened remonstrance he consented: we knelt together at the throne of grace; and when we arose he said with a look and with an accent I shall never forget, 'It is too late now, sir!' With this horrifying sentence vibrating in my ears, I descended from his bedroom, and walked away; sighing as I went, and occasionally turning as I passed onwards to look on the dwelling in which still lived a sinner, who could only utter one sentence, and that one sentence proclaiming his fixed belief that it was 'too late' for him to hope for salvation. He survived this heart-rending interview only a few hours, and then expired—

"Without one cheerful beam of hope,
Or spark of glimmering day."

Reader, thank God with all your heart, that it is not yet too late for you to seek salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Seek it *now*, lest you should be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Every hour you neglect it, your heart becomes harder and harder; and religion postponed generally ends in the loss of the soul. The door is open now, but soon it will be "shut." The language of the Redeemer now is, "Come;" but, in the great day of account, it will be to the impenitent, "I never knew you, depart from me." As you are at death, so will you be for ever. Your character, your memory and conscience, will remain with you in eternity. And if your sins are not pardoned on earth, the ever-enduring sentence will be, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still."

Turn ye then to the Saviour. He waits to receive you; and there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. He knows your heart and your wanderings. He has marked your sins; not one of them is forgotten before him; yet may you look to him, by repentance and faith, for salvation and eternal life: "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." "Wash and be clean." Delay not, lest the space given you for repentance expire, and you perish in your sins. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in and shall not be able. When once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he will say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." "Watch, therefore;"—"for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh."

I HOPE TO BE A CHRISTIAN.

You do? Why, then, do you not seek to be a Christian? "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." "Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye search for me with all your heart."

Are you seeking for God with all your hearts? No man ever yet escaped from the thralldom of sin and Satan, who did not earnestly struggle to be free; no man ever entered the strait gate who did not strive to accomplish that glorious end. Carelessness and inattention afford no foundation for a hope that you are to become a child of God.

You hope to be a Christian. Why, then, do you not give up your sins, renounce the world as your portion, and cheerfully surrender yourself to Him who is the way, the truth, and the life? He is ready and willing to receive you. He gave his life a ransom for sinners. He freely gives his Spirit to all who earnestly ask him: he has filled his revealed word with invitations and encouragements to those who desire his grace: he has long been knocking at the door of your heart for admission. How then can you ever hope to be a Christian?

You hope to be a Christian. When? Not now. You are too busy, or have something in view which must first be accomplished, or are so indisposed to give yourself to the work, that this is not felt to be the "convenient season." After a while, when you have accumulated a fortune, or passed the period when you can partake in the world's pleasures, or when there is a revival of religion, or, at furthest, on a dying bed, you hope to be a Christian. But God's commands and promises are for the present. He gives no encouragement to wait for a future season. You have no assurance that there shall be any season beyond the present. Before the expected time comes you may be in eternity.

You hope to be a Christian. So multitudes of others like yourself, who were living in sin, have hoped; but where are they now? Long ago have they been cut down as cumberers of the ground. Their day of grace and day of life have closed. They lived without Christ, and they died without him: they trifled away their precious time on earth, in the delusive hope that some day or other they would be Christians. That day never came to them, and never will come. "The harvest is past, the summer is ended;" and they are not saved.

H Y M N .

STOP, poor sinners, stop and think,
 Before you further go;
 Will you sport upon the brink
 Of everlasting woe?
 On the verge of ruin stop—
 Now the friendly warning take—
 Stay your footsteps—ere you drop
 Into the burning lake.

Say, have you an arm like God,
 That you his will oppose?
 Fear ye not that iron rod
 With which he breaks his foes?
 Can you stand in that dread day,
 Which his justice shall proclaim,
 When the earth shall melt away
 Like wax before the flame?

Ghastly death will quickly come,
 And drag you to his bar;
 Then to hear your awful doom,
 Will fill you with despair!
 All your sins will round you crowd;
 You shall mark their crimson dye;
 Each for vengeance crying loud,
 And what can you reply?

Though your heart were made of steel,
 Your forehead lined with brass;
 God at length will make you feel,
 He will not let you pass;
 Sinners then in vain will call,
 Those who now despise his grace,
 "Rocks and mountains on us fall,
 And hide us from his face."

